



Wooden Buttons

Written By: Kristin Roach

TOOLS:

- [Drill \(1\)](#)
- [Jigsaw \(1\)](#)
or coping saw and vise or C-clamps
- [Knife \(1\)](#)
- [Sandpaper \(1\)](#)

PARTS:

- [Branch \(1\)](#)
- [Beeswax \(1\)](#)

SUMMARY

After a big windstorm, it can be a little overwhelming to look at all the branches and sticks that need to be picked up in the yard. Instead of dreading this cleanup task, you can see it as a chance to collect all sorts of great materials for creative projects.

For example: I really like wooden buttons, but the ones from stores are often so highly polished that they barely look like wood at all. Here's how to make nicer ones out of fallen branches that you find yourself. These buttons are smooth, but they retain the beautiful characteristics of the tree they came from — grain, texture, and even bark, if you choose. They are the perfect thing to adorn your totes, shirts, bags, or any other project that needs a little tree bling!

Step 1 — Choose a branch and remove the bark (optional).



- Find a hardwood branch with a straight section 6"–8" long by $\frac{3}{4}$ "– $1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide. You can use a fallen branch or cut one yourself, but make sure it has no sticky sap and a small pith (the hollow or spongy center), no more than 1/8" for a 1"-wide branch.
- Moisture level is important. Branches that are too dry will snap when bent, and freshly fallen or cut branches will need to dry out in the sun for a day or two before being made into buttons. Buttons cut from wood that's too green or wet will crack once they dry all the way. Expect some trial and error with determining the right moisture. 
- You can leave the bark on your buttons, but if you want to remove it, use a sharp knife to peel away 2"–3" of bark at one end of the branch, working around it evenly with shallow strokes. It's important that your knife is really sharp; if it's dull, removing the bark isn't just a pain — you're also more likely to slip and cut yourself.

Step 2 — Drill the holes and cut the buttons.



- Place the branch in a vise and use the 1/16" bit to drill 2 or 4 evenly spaced holes into the cut center of the branch. Keep the drill level with the branch, or your holes will be skewed, and don't drill too close to the perimeter of the branch, or you may break through it.
- Use a jigsaw or coping saw to cut 1/8"-wide circular slices from the branch.

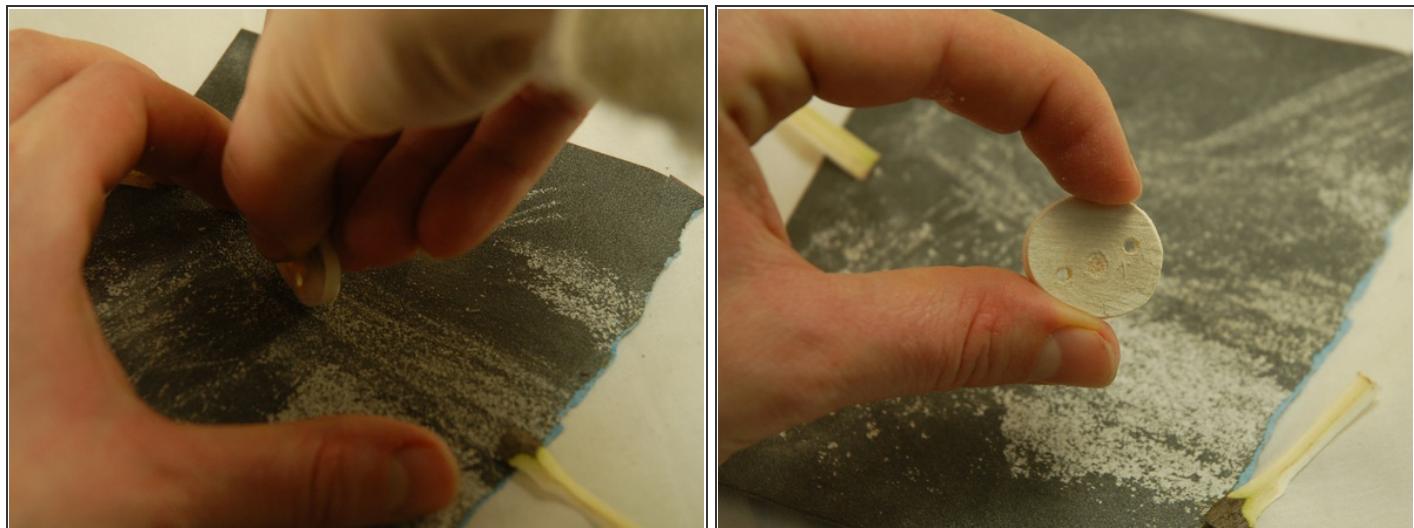
Step 3 — Clean out the holes.



- Next you'll need to clean the wood pulp out of the holes and widen them. Hold the 5/64" bit in your hand and gently turn it through all the buttonholes to widen them. Repeat with the 3/32" bit.
- You may want to use a bit of cloth for grasping the drill bit or you could hurt your fingers over the course of making a half-dozen buttons — as I did the first time.



Step 4 — Finish the buttons.



- Sand the buttons, starting with the 220-grit sandpaper and working through to the finest grit. Depending on how rough you want your buttons, you can do just a few strokes or work all the way up to 600-grit sandpaper to make them really smooth. If you want to finish the buttons with a natural seal, rub on a little beeswax then wipe off the residue with a clean cloth.
- Try out a few different ways of sanding and finishing with individual buttons. Once you find a finish you like, go crazy and make a whole set that way!

This project first appeared in [MAKE Volume 24](#), page 126.

This document was last generated on 2012-11-03 02:53:14 AM.